



How Can the Translator Match the Differences in Grammar and Lexicon Between the Source and Target Languages?

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to examine several problems with translation and how these can be addressed. This paper discusses a number of stylistic factors that contribute to translation problems. Some of them are due to cultural differences, while others relate to the different lexical and grammatical forms of the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). Finding the proper equivalents to some collocations and the use of loan words in the source text may pose problems during the translation process. It is not always easy nor possible to find a word with the same meaning in the TL, because some words possess cultural meanings. It is noteworthy to mention that existing idiomatic expressions in the SL may create more problems for translation. This paper highlights the challenges that a translator may face and how those challenges can be surmounted. The main objective of this study, however, is to examine the problems that arise when translating culture-bound idioms and expressions from Arabic into English and vice versa. The strategies that a translator can employ to overcome these obstacles are proposed and discussed. Moreover, the differences between the Arabic and English languages, in addition to their cultural differences, make the process of translating a veritable challenge.

"There are three grades of translation evils: 1. errors; 2. slips; 3. willful reshaping."

Vladimir Nabokov

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation is a tool used to convey the meaning of a text from one language (source language; SL) into another (target language; TL), either orally or in writing. However, translation is a creative work, and one that plays a key role in exchanging sciences between nations. Our prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) urged his followers to learn foreign languages. Indeed, it has been said that, *من تعلم لغة قوم أمن مكرهم* (Whoever learns the language of a people is deemed to be safe from their cunning).

Shivtiel (1994, p.3) further stated that, "the process of the transference of the data from language A to language B cannot be detailed". Indeed, a translation depends on a multitude of diverse factors, such as the type of text, the cultural background of the text, and the background and skills of the translator. Giving two or more people a text to translate from one language to another is one method to ascertain the complexity of

the translation process, as the result would be different translations. Although the resulting translations might share the same words and grammatical structures, they would not be exactly alike.

Translators encounter many problems during the translation process due to the characteristic features of each language. Non-equivalence is merely the tip of the iceberg. For example, translators face the problem that there may not always be a match in the TL that conveys the same meaning in the SL. This problem usually occurs when the translator translates expressions or proverbs that require him/her to have a deep knowledge of the culture of the TL. For example, there is no equivalent of the Arabic term (**elmisyar marriage**) in English. This paper discusses these translation problems, as well as problems that can lead to a mismatch in grammar and lexicon between the two languages, and how to overcome them. In this paper, examples of these problems are provided in both Arabic and English.

Differences in grammatical patterns, lexical structures, stylistic features, and cultural expressions, as well as the difficulty of finding equivalence, are all significant problems for translators. According to Biguenet and Schulte (1989, p. xii), translators aim to discover the relations between words, as well as the relations between a word and its contextual meaning, its cultural roots, and its etymology. Thus, understanding the different meanings of words, especially homonyms, polysyms, and synonyms, is key to achieving a good translation. **Polyseme** refers to a word that has several meanings. In English, the word (**can**) has many different meanings: {a modal verb: to open something, such as a mental container; e.g. I **can** open the **can**). In Arabic, the word (حار; **har**) also has more than one meaning. For example, (سلام حار; **salamun har**; a warm welcome) or (طعام حار; **taamun har**; spicy food). **Synonym** refers to a word that has the same meaning as another. Synonyms can sometimes create confusion in the translation process. For instance, in Arabic, the verbs (توفي مات; **tuwifia-mata**; to die) have the same meaning. We say (مات الرجل-توفي الرجل- مات الحمار; **mata alhimar-tuwifia al rajul-mata alrajul**; the donkey died, the man died), but we cannot say (توفي الحمار; **tuwifia alhimar**). Similarly, in English, the two verbs (**take-grab**) have the same meaning. You can say (**take a book or grab a book, take your hands or grab your hands**), but it is (**take a photo, not grab a photo**).

2. DIFFERENCES IN CULTURE

"Translation is a process that involves looking for similarities between language and cultures" (Venuti 1995, as cited in Rubel, P. & Roseman, A, 2003). This means that cultural dissimilarities, especially figures of speech (e.g. simile, metaphor, personification, etc.) always create problems for translators; the best way to overcome these problems is the replacement of the cultural hints of the SL by target cultural material (Kusssmaul, 1995, p.65-67).

A translator should take cultural differences between the SL and the TL into consideration to avoid cultural clashes or the cultural motive clashes. In other words, some words in a specific language may have a positive meaning, while in another language they have a negative meaning. Kusssmaul (1995) also warns of differences that may arise in the connotative meaning of words between the SL and the TL.

In Arabic, the word owl is connected to traits such as stupidity or bad luck, whereas in English owls are symbolic of wisdom. For these reasons, it is clear that words may lose their real or expressive meaning when

translated into another language. For example, in Arabic, the word (مجاهد; **mujahid**; **someone who fights for his/her country**) has a precious meaning. However, it is usually translated into English as (**terrorist**), regardless of the fact that this word does not encompass the real exact meaning of the original Arabic.

Translators must also be careful when attempting the direct translation of an idiom, as idioms in any language are rooted in the cultural and social milieu of the community.

Indeed, idiomatic expressions require the translator to possess a deeper cultural knowledge for both the SL and the TL to ensure that the appropriate meaning is conveyed and that the same stylistic features are employed.

Good translators must also be careful when attempting a direct translation of any collocations. Collocations, which are language-specific words used together, play a vital role in language. Baker (1992, p.54) has noted that, if the patterns of collocations differ between the TL and the SL (known as collocational clashes), then the translation is considered to be poor. Larson (1984) has further distinguished between cultural clashes and collocational clashes, claiming that the latter should not affect the former. Many types of collocations have been identified by linguists depending on the nature of the collocations at hand. Ghazala (1995) classifies collocations depending on the grammatical groupings of word classes according to their occurrence together, and he has thus affirmed that the translator's effort and competence can overcome such a problem. However, some SL collocations do not have identical TL equivalents. In such cases, the translator's role is to find acceptable translations, like (موت هادئ; **peaceful death**) and the best rendering of the collocation (**heart and soul**), which functions as an adverb, is (قلباً وقالياً). Nevertheless, the translator should be aware that different words may be used, and thus should not be constrained by the words in the SL collocations.

In English, the noun (**heart**) collocates with the adjective (**golden**). In Arabic, the same noun is used, but with a different adjective (**white**) to become (قلب أبيض; **khalbun abyad**; a man who has a white heart). This translation takes into account the cultural differences between the two languages, whereas (رجل ذو قلب أبيض; **rajulun du kalben abyad**; he has a heart of gold) does not. Below are other examples of collocation clashes between the Arabic and English languages.

| Arabic | English |
|--|---|
| Shapes and colours (a variety of something). | Shapes and sizes (many different types of something). |
| Run like an arrow (to run very fast). | Run like the wind. |
| Black envy (jealous). | Green with envy. |

Some words possess culture-bound meanings, and therefore do not have equivalence in the TL. Several problems in translation are due to the emotional and cultural meanings of such words in the SL. The translator must thus be aware of the potential pitfalls of these words. Otherwise, the author's intended meaning may be lost when translated into the TL.

Nevertheless, these words can often be paraphrased, such as صلاة الاستخارة; **the prayer of estikharah**), which is a prayer that a Muslim can perform to seek advice from Allah about something that s/he cannot make a decision about. Moreover, (زواج المسيار; **zawaj elmisyar; Almisyar marriage**) is a specific kind of marriage in Islamic culture. Although it fulfils all the conditions of the marriage contract and is a legitimate marriage, in this type of marriage the woman gives up her rights of housing and maintenance. As previously noted, translation is the process of rendering a text from one language into another. Therefore, "any theory of translation must draw upon a theory of language—a general linguistic theory" (Catford, 1965, p.1). Catford has also stated in his theory of translation equivalence that, in translation, there is a replacement of the SL meaning but on the other hand it is not changing the meanings of the TL. Moreover, grammatical and lexical structures should also be taken into consideration during the translation process.

If we want to apply Catford's theory, for instance, **(This is the bag she bought)** would be **(hadhihi al haqiba alati ishtaratha)** in Arabic. The grammatical translation for this is **(Hadhihi al bag alati buy tuha)**, but the lexical translation is **(this is the haqiba she ishtaratha)**.

In the grammatical translation, we keep the two main lexical items 'bag' and 'buy', but change the grammatical items by determining their equivalence: **(Hadhihi)** for **(this)** and **(al)** for **(the)**.

3. THE USE OF LOAN WORDS

There are numerous words that have no equivalence in the TL. These are called loan words, and are usually transliterated (written in the alphabet of the TL). The following are some examples of loan words that have

been transliterated from Arabic to English and vice versa.

| Arabic | English |
|----------|-----------|
| حناء | henna |
| جهاد | jihad |
| حزب الله | hizbullah |
| حجاب | hijab |

| English | Arabic |
|----------|---------|
| Gas | غاز |
| Video | فيديو |
| Vitamin | فيتامين |
| Internet | انترنت |

Some of the loan words that entered into the Arab world have since been replaced by Arabic words. According to Bahumid (1994), these loan words and neologisms can make translating the text difficult for translators, as they now have to choose whether to use the Arabicisation or the translation, such as:

- الهاتف المحمول is substituted for موبايل (mobile phone)
- الجهاز المسموع is substituted for الراديو (radio)
- الحمام is substituted for تواليت (toilet)

4. LEXICAL AND GRAMMATICAL ERRORS

There are various errors that a translator may make if s/he does not carefully consider the differences between the SL and the TL, especially in terms of grammatical patterns and lexical structures. However,

a good translator can overcome such difficulties by avoiding using word-for-word translation.

In his theory, Catford (1969) stated that the “lexical adaptation to TL collocational or ‘idiomatic’ requirements seems to be characteristic of free translation”.

The following are examples of common grammatical and lexical errors that an Arabic translator may make when rendering a text into English.

| Grammatical Errors | | Lexical errors | |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Crocodiles' tears(×) | Crocodile tears(√) | A cat has seven lives(×) | A cat has nine lives(√) |

5. DEALING WITH ABBREVIATIONS IN TRANSLATION

The use of abbreviations is a relatively new linguistics phenomenon. Abbreviation is the art of reducing a sequence of words to a single, representative letter. According to Abdul-Raof (2001), an acronym is a combination of the initial letters of several words that can be pronounced as an independent word. Oftentimes, religious acronyms are difficult to translate and pose several challenges to the translators; these words typically cannot be translated without perfect knowledge of the culture of the TL. Larson (1984) has stated that, "terms which deal with the religious aspects of a culture are usually the most difficult, both in analysis of the source vocabulary and in finding the best receptor language equivalence". This is because these words are intangible, and many of the practices are so automatic that native speakers are not conscious of the various aspects of meaning involved. Therefore, the translator will encounter much difficulty in translating terms and expressions that are not used or practiced in the TL.

Some examples in Arabic include: hasbala, hamdl, (حسبلة-حمدل), acronyms of the Arabic phrases meaning (sufficient is Allah for us and He is the best disposer of affairs, All praise is due to Allah.). Other acronyms used recently by specialists in chemistry and psychology include: حلمة (حلمة), حلقطة (حلمة), حلمة (حلمة) which they rendered to English as, to hydrolyze, daydream, psychosomatic respectively. Sometimes, there are no translations for acronyms, which are originally symbols of corporate flags or products. In these instances, transliteration can be used followed by a literal translation in the TL, such

as GM and IBM. However, for acronyms such as (NVC), which stands for 'non-verbal communication', the whole phrase should be rendered (الاتصال غير اللفظي) without translating the abbreviation, since (نفك) will not make sense in the TL.

6. CLASSIFICATION OF WORDS

Languages differ from each other in their grammatical structures as well. Thus, it is important for a translator to know how to form a sentence correctly in the TL. For instance, the structure of Arabic is not the same as English in terms of vocabulary classification. There are two different classes of words:

1. Words of closed class: morphemes that serve a grammatical function but do not have a meaning; these include prepositions, articles, plurals and conjunctions.

2. Words of open class: lexical items that have a referential meaning and can be extended by adding prefixes or suffixes; these include verbs, nouns, adjective and adverbs (Abdul-Raof, 2001) Newmark (as cited in Anderman & Roger, 1996) has stated that the open-word classes mentioned above are most likely to have correspondence in other languages; in other words, it is easy to find an equivalence for lexical items in the TL. Regarding the differences between the agreement of plural nouns in Arabic and English, agreement between the plural noun (verb, adjective, pronoun, etc.) and the noun in Arabic depends on whether the noun is non-human or human (Zaher & Whitehouse, 2009). For example, the sentence (**the political parties work to achieve peace**) should be translated to (الأحزاب السياسية تعمل على تحقيق السلام); the translation (الأحزاب السياسية يعملون على تحقيق السلام) is grammatically incorrect. The first translation is correct because, in Arabic, non-human nouns are treated the same as feminine singular nouns; thus, any word following a non-human plural noun must also be feminine singular. The words (الأحزاب; **parties**) and (تعمل; **work**) are non-human nouns, so they must be treated as feminine singular nouns.

Megarb (1999; as cited in Holman & Beier, 1999) defined the process of translation as being “often accompanied by a set of language shifts”.

7. SHIFTS IN TRANSLATION

Translation shifts cannot lead to changes in meaning in the SL. There are two considerable forms of translation shift:

Level shift: when an SL item linguistically has a corresponding translation in the TL at a different level.

Category shift: are switched from formal equivalence (Catford, 1969, p.73).

The following are examples of translation shifts from English to Arabic.

1. Changing the preposition:

The victories of Salah Aldeen Alayoubi.

الانتصارات التي حققها صلاح الدين الأيوبي

Here the preposition (**of**) is changed to (التي), which is a relative pronoun.

2. Changing adverbs into many forms:

He loves money so much.

يحب المال كثيرا- يحب المال حبا جما

3. Changing verbs to nouns:

Doctors recommend that one litre and a half of water be drunk daily.

يوصي الأطباء بضرورة شرب لتر ونصف من الماء يوميا

Here the verb (**be drunk**) is changed to a noun (شرب).

8. CONCLUSION

Cultural differences (social and religious) between the SL and the TL makes the translation process especially challenging.

From a grammatical and lexical standpoint, Arabic and English differ in several key ways; this paper specifically discusses the stylistic factors that contribute to translation problems. Some problems with translation are due to cultural differences, while others relate to the different lexical and grammatical forms of the SL and the TL. Thus, translation can be considered a kind of art, as translators require special skills to achieve their aim. This study reveals that the translator's knowledge of a particular culture can help them to recognize the meaning of an idiom, collocation or acronym in the SL, particularly one with a non-literal meaning. Lastly, based on this study, it can be concluded that the most professional translators translate into their mother tongue.

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